

**KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

***HISTORY OF THE COBB COUNTY BRANCH OF THE NAACP AND CIVIL RIGHTS  
ACTIVITIES IN COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA***

**AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE HIST 4425 (ORAL HISTORY) CLASS AT  
KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY, FALL SEMESTER 2009**

**INTERVIEWS WITH MARY WARD CATER**

**COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 30**

**CONDUCTED BY TRAVIS FRIED and JEREMY WATKINS  
THURSDAY, 29 OCTOBER, 2009**

**AND**

**CONDUCTED BY ERIN SANDLIN  
FRIDAY, 6 NOVEMBER 2009**

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 30  
Interview with Mary Ward Cater  
Conducted by Travis Fried and Jeremy Watkins  
Thursday, 29 October 2009  
Location: Ms. Cater's residence

TF: Real briefly, tell us a little bit about you background, where did you originally grow up, brothers, sisters, things of that nature.

MC: I have thirteen sisters and brothers. I grew up in Mableton, Georgia. I was born in northwest Atlanta in Scott's Crossing. Scott's Crossing is named after my great-grandfather, Reverend William J. Scott. The community and the elementary school are named after him. I am the thirteenth of fourteen children. I have two sons, one daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren. I was married to Allen Wylie Cater, Sr. twenty-nine years. I went to Washington Street Elementary School in Austell, Georgia. I went to Pebblebrook High School, but I graduated from Frederick Douglass High School. My mom and dad separated, I think during my last two years of high school or year and a half of high school, so I had to go wherever she was living.

TF: When you were growing up, what demographic of neighborhood did you live in? Were you in a predominately African-American neighborhood or mixed?

MC: I grew up in south Cobb County which is Mableton. The neighborhoods were divided; there were black communities and white communities. We were in a black community. Another community where my great-grandfather on my father's side purchased land—he purchased land from a slave owner by the name of Rucker, and then he had many acres of land. He passed the land down to his children and on to their children's children. I grew up in an area where there were really not many public utilities; we had to walk to the school bus because we lived on dirt roads. On the street where I lived there were four or five black families, and the property goes back as far as 1827. My father was a sharecropper. He owned his own vegetable business where he peddled vegetables, but he also at one point worked for the fruit growers express, but he was basically into his own business. My mother worked at a cotton mill, Whittier Cotton Mill, and most of my life she was there. She had the public job. He worked his own business and sharecropped. We grew up in south Cobb County and/or northwest Atlanta which at that time, at the time of my older sisters—I've got some sisters that are like 75 years old—at their time there was not much difference in south Cobb County and the Chattahoochee area. It was kind of like together in some senses. Riverside, Chattahoochee, south Cobb County, Mableton—that's where I grew up.

TF: What would you say of your parents' incomes; did you have a pretty comfortable upbringing?

MC: I had a very comfortable upbringing. I never wanted for anything. My dad was a sharecropper. We had our own land. He had his own animals, livestock. My mother worked, so I never wanted . . . if they had problems we didn't know about it. My older sisters may be able to tell you a different side than me because I have a sister that's twenty years older than me. I'm the thirteenth child, and there's only one other below me, so everybody else was above me. We lived a pretty okay life. Our grandparents, both sides, had things, especially land that they left to family members. My mother's father owned just as much land over in northwest Atlanta. With my mother being kind of like an only child living, a lot was passed down through her, and plus she worked on a public job. My dad always had a job, well, because he sharecropped, so he always had a business that he was running. So yes, I lived pretty comfortably.

TF: I take it your family owned the land that your home was on?

MC: It's their property. The land passed down from my great-grandfather. He purchased it from Rucker, then at a time they made a loan, lost the land, and then my father purchased the land back. He paid the bill, which wasn't that much, and got the land back from Dr. Haggart. When he passed the land passed to his fourteen children. If one passed away it passed to their wife and their children, so it just trickles down, the land does.

TF: You say there were four or five other black families living on your street. Were they in a similar situation or was the ownership of the land unique to your family?

MC: Most of the folks that lived on the street where I lived were my relatives. They were from George William Felker. My great-grandfather was G.W. Felker. From G.W. Felker land came down through his children. He had nine children, Mamie, Asalee—Asalee was my grandmother—Joseph, George, Mamie, Aguita, Cooper, John and Nank. Each of them had children. All of the nine children got a tract of land. Once they got the tract of land a bill was made and the land was lost. So my father, from his mother, Asalee, purchased the land back which he paid off the bill to the Haggarts. He paid the bill off to the Haggarts, and all the land went to my dad. From there my dad did the right thing. Asalee wanted all of her six children to have an equal portion of the land, so that's how the land just drizzled down into our family. I've got thirteen sisters and brothers, sixty-seven nieces and nephews, over 150-something great-nieces and nephews, and the numbers grows. We're down to the fifth or sixth generation, so naturally the number would grow because everybody is having four and five babies, and some have six and seven children. I have a very huge family. As a matter of fact, we're thought of as the largest family in the state of Georgia. We have a lot of influential people in the family. Justice Leah Ward Sears was the first black female elected to the Supreme Court of Georgia, the first [African American] anywhere in the United States. Her husband is Haskell Ward. Well, Haskell is a blood relative of ours, but he came from the Griffin area. Felker Ward is my cousin, and he's one of my daddy's brother's children. Felker was appointed from the state of Georgia over the minority affairs department through Governor Busbee or Miller, one or the other did it. I sent that to you, a copy of that. So that's how our name comes into the Felkers. It's really Felkers and Wards; it's not Felker

Ward, although his name was Felker Ward. His dad's name was Felker Ward, Sr. That was just the two families put together.

TF: You said there are a lot of influential people, and you mentioned Scott's Crossing. Was that your grandfather?

MC: That was my great-grandfather on my mother's side, the Scott side. I don't know what color he was. We assume he was black. I have a picture of him. Anyway, he was Reverend Scott. He owned a lot of land in Scott's Crossing. He is buried behind the Aaron Tabernacle Church in Scott's Crossing [1785 Hollywood Rd., NW, Atlanta]. He donated land [in 1949] for the first school for African-Americans because they had to go to church schools. He pastored the first church school in that area. Then he gave the land to build the public school on for the kids to go to school there also. He owned a lot of land in Scott's Crossing. The school [Scott Elementary] doesn't have a lot of history on his background. I think the family has more history on his background and his sisters' pictures and such as that. We've sent the school information. They're now just updating information on him because, number one, they didn't know that he was black.

TF: What year did you start school?

MC: I'm fifty-five years old. I was born in '54. I guess [I started school in] '60 or '61.

TF: What was the name of the school?

MC: The first school I went to was William J. Scott Elementary School.

TF: Was that in Mableton?

MC: No, that was in northwest Atlanta. That's my great-grandfather's school. Then I was transferred to Washington Street Elementary School in Austell. The children in Mableton couldn't go to public schools there. We were bussed to school in Austell.

TF: Why couldn't you go to school in Mableton?

MC: Well, I assume because they had no schools for the black kids to go to in Mableton because desegregation had not taken place.

TF: William J. Scott School was a black school in northwest Atlanta?

MC: Right. My sister, Gwendolyn Dillard, is seventy-five years old. She couldn't go to school in Cobb County period. My father sharecropped in Cobb County, and they lived here on the weekend and through the week, but my mother also had a house in northwest Atlanta. They had to go back to northwest Atlanta so that Gwendolyn, Samuel, Sidney, and that group could go to school in Atlanta because the schools had not been desegregated then. They didn't have Washington Street Elementary School then. Washington Street was named the Austell Colored School. The Acworth school was

called the colored school, and the school in Smyrna was the colored school. The lines were very unique. Although you would think that that the colored school in Smyrna would have taken care of the children in northwest Atlanta because of how the districts were then; it's not like how it is now. I think that it has reverted to what it was back then because now we have state representatives that run in Atlanta that cover our area, like Sheila Jones, for instance. My state representative is from Atlanta and that was never until after the last redistricting took place. I assume that I started out at Scott School because we couldn't go to school in Cobb County.

TF: Did your parents ever sit you down and try to explain it or did you even question the times?

MC: Never. Children were never in grown-ups' discussions. Children are in grown-ups' discussion now. But we knew nothing about desegregation; we knew nothing about segregation; we knew nothing about civil rights; we knew nothing about color. My oldest son is thirty-five. When our house got shot into in Mableton, he told me that some boys came up to the car, or a girl, and he said, "Mom, they said they were sorry." He said, "We're sorry y'all are having so much trouble." And I said, "Well, what color were they?" He said, "This color." He just pointed at the inside of his hand. I said, "So were they white?" He said, "No, they were not white." I said, "Were they black?" He said, "No, they weren't black." I said, "Well, what color were they?" He pointed at the color of his hand, and then I realized that he didn't know what black and white were because we are not black and you are not white. Then I pointed at some people. I said, "Were they that color?" He said, "Yes." That's when I got that he didn't know the difference, so that's how we were raised. We were raised in the Turleys, the Dukes, the Phillippes, the Suttons, those are the people that were the elected officials and the people that were the heads in south Cobb County. We didn't know color. We were raised in their homes, so we didn't know that. Even when my house got shot into, to tell me I can't live on a street because white people are on that street, I never heard of junk like that.

TF: So growing up there was almost integration to an extent; everybody kind of co-mingled together?

JW: Were there any white children around?

MC: Never. I never knew a white child.

TF: So that's just how separated the neighborhoods were.

MC: Yes, I never knew white children. I never saw white children. Going to school, we lived on Ivey Road, and it was a dirt road, so we would have to walk to the top of the hill or the bottom of the hill because the buses couldn't make it—their streets were paved, our streets were not paved. I never saw their bus. I saw some children, but I never gave it any thought. I never played with white children. I went with my sisters to clean houses sometimes, and I just thought that was the way they made extra money. I never thought about it. I was not taught it to think about it. As far as why were there children in that

house and they were not children in our school, I don't know. I never gave any thought to it. I never had a white friend as a child.

TF: When you went to Washington Street, just tell us a little bit about the school and your experience there.

MC: When we went to Washington Street, they had to find us a bus driver, and I'm assuming that's why I was at the school at Scott's Crossing. They told Ms. Betsy Runner, if you can find a bus driver—this was one of the older ladies; she was a preacher down the street from us—if you could find a bus driver we'll give you a bus. But they told her that they wouldn't go help her find a bus driver. She had to go into the community and find somebody. She found a man named Lucius Brown. Lucius was in the military, and so he could afford to drive the bus on the salary that they would give him. They hired the different workers. The bus driver went into the cafeteria and worked, and so that made a full salary instead of just a few hours' salary. Lucius would drive us to school when we did start going to school. I was first grade. So when he would drive us, we had to obey our bus driver. The bus driver was our livelihood going to school. He would pick us up; he would tell us where to meet. He would never go down Bankhead Highway with us. He always had to go Old Alabama Road and take us to school. We went Old Alabama Road and there was an old bridge there. Whenever it rained that water would come out of the banks, and it would overflow. I know I was a little girl. My feet weren't even long enough to touch the floors on the bus. But Lucius would have to get off the bus because that motor would die out in the middle of that bridge. I hated it. I detested it then, and I detest it now. He would get out of the bus. He would close the door with the force of that water. Some kind of way he would get it closed. He'd tell us, do not get off this bus. No matter what happens, do not get off of this bus. So he would work on the bus. There was nobody that would come to help. I would have thought a policeman or somebody would have come. I never saw a police.

I never even knew what a policeman was when I was little. I never saw police when I was a young girl. I was of age when I saw a policeman. But we had trigger points—we would leave the Sanders home, and we would ride. It seemed like they had a system, as I was a little girl noticing that if the bus didn't get from the Sanders house to the Watkins house by a certain time, the school officials would send somebody looking for us because they had to get us safely to our designated points. Plus, it seemed like when they told Ms. Runner they weren't going to help to get us to school, all the burdens were on them. You asked for it and they gave us the raggiest bus in the world. But our parents talked, and we would listen to them talk, just a little bit, not a lot because you didn't get involved in the parents' conversations. And then there was the white people, the Bogazans, right there on Queens Mill road, would bring dresses, would bring different stuff. The Turleys, okay, now they watched out too. If we didn't get on that bus right there, if a child was missing, there were families that watched, not police, and so if we didn't make it to the school in time, then I'm assuming they had another system in place right there, whenever it rained, whenever it snowed, because when it rained it was muddy roads and we had to get through the mud to the bus. So when we would get to school, they would always feed us breakfast. We always had to eat breakfast. You had to force it down you if you didn't

want it. You're going to eat breakfast. That was really important. You're going to get breakfast in the morning. So that's how school was.

TF: Do you feel like you got a good education there? Were the teachers good?

MC: Yes. We were happy in school. Everybody knew everybody. You knew the teachers. We got whippings; we got beatings in school; you would rather have gotten a beating at home than at school. We were paddled very well at school. We had Mr. Holiday, Ms. McGivens, Ms. Scott, Mr. Scott, the Watkinses were the cooks—Mamie and Mable Watkins were twin cooks in the kitchen. Ms. Pearson, a lot of teachers, we had many teachers. Ms. Elliot. When I was in the third grade I stole my mother's Eisenhower dollars. I stole three of them. My mother beat the blood out of me. My mother beat me so I was bleeding. My daddy had to pull Mama off of me. You did not do stuff. And the teacher told on me. You know, they were the community beyond the community.

TF: They were definitely concerned with your upbringing, just like your parents were?

MC: Oh yes. Because see, our parents were working. I think you're going to interview my sister Susanne [Henry]. Although she's six years younger than me, she has a lot of history, more than I do, on the schools. My father took us to school when the schools did desegregate. Okay, we had two buses that came out of Washington Street Elementary School; J.C. Kimble, who was the Kimble family coming out of Powder Springs, and then we had Lucius coming out of Mableton and Austell. If one of them was sick that one bus driver had to pick up the whole neighborhood, all of the people, and our teachers had to drive the bus sometimes. They had to make it work.

TF: Is it safe to assume that all the faculty and staff at the Washington Street School were African-American as well?

MC: Yes. I really do mean it. We did not know what white people were! To me, we were in a world where we didn't know what white people were. You just didn't ever think about it. I guess with my grandfather's great-grandfathers: G.W. Felker, was a German and a white—whatever color he was. William J. Scott is the same. So for us, who cared? It didn't matter. People were just people. It wasn't until I went to high school that I learned that there was a difference. I left from Washington Street, and we heard of a man named John F. Kennedy. I remember sitting there and looking at TV. It was so sad that he got killed. He got killed, and they had his funeral in Washington. We had just gotten TVs, and it just took up the whole TV. We knew he was an important man, and he was the President of the United States. Now what did that President of the United States mean back then; we didn't know a lot. Then there came a man named Dr. Martin Luther King, and he got killed. I knew that I didn't want to be in those fields. Whatever area they were in, I knew I didn't want to be because it seemed like whatever they were doing and in whatever area they were in, they got killed. I remember the very day, I was sitting on Ivey Road in Mableton; we didn't have school then; and all day long we had to look at Dr. King, and the shooting just kept replaying and replaying.

I don't know if you were at Zion [Baptist Church] when we did the black history theme when I spoke at it, but the man that's sitting there, Pastor Julian Carter, was the first black color guard in the Army and a sergeant, and he lives right there in Atlanta. Behind John F. Kennedy's casket was a black man; it was him. And he's going to be at the breakfast with me on this coming Saturday. He's not an old, old guy, but he's an older gentleman, so God has blessed me with a lot of influential people. I watched what civil rights was or what change was, because I didn't even know what the word civil rights was. I watched what those people were doing to bring about some change, but in later life I got a chance to meet a lot of those folks that brought about that change. Why did it come up that way? I have no idea. Then I left Washington Street, and again parents didn't talk to children. I graduated and went to the fifth or the sixth grade, and I went to Austell Middle School only for a short period of time.

TF: You said that was either fifth or sixth grade?

MC: It was fifth or sixth grade. We went to that school, and it was just a little period of time. I don't know why the transition, but I don't think desegregation had taken place right then. The desegregation came, I believe in '68. I've got some pictures for you of the schools and all of the children that were in the schools during that time. That was '69, that's when it was, okay. The desegregation may have taken place in '68, but we couldn't go into the schools just then, so I transferred. They transferred us from Washington Street Elementary School to Austell, either elementary or middle school, whichever one it was, for only a brief minute. Then the parents took us. I went to Lindley, and I remember my first day at Lindley. Lindley was on Old Alabama Road. I never knew the significance of that street name. J.B. Stoner met us at the school, and I think Lester Maddox was the governor, and he met us. He was there. I remember we walked into the school, and there were the teachers; the principal was there; and everybody was all around us, on us, taking pictures of us. I didn't know what was the big commotion. We were just going to school. But J.B. Stoner was calling us "niggers," and I had to learn what that was. Now, I don't know why he did it, but sometimes poor white people, especially in that area, would use that term. There's a black guy named Willie Freeman. He delivered Governor Roy Barnes on March 11, his wedding anniversary, and he said, "I've got a video tape with an interview of you." He said, "They called us one name, and we'll call them 'honky' or we'll call them whatever." He said, "I think that was just a common thing for them." So when we were called that name, I didn't care. It didn't bother me because I had a good foundation at home. I knew who my dad was. I knew who my mom was. We had a house. We had two houses down on Ivey Road. Never did I want anything, so I didn't take it personally calling me that, but I think the school took it very personally. We were trained to never be in bathrooms by ourselves. We were trained to not laugh when they call us that name. The purpose of that was because you had some children that were raised by Klan. You have to always remember that that part of the county and Powder Springs is where the camp was, the Klan camp.

As I grew older, I didn't know what was going on then, but I flip-flopped back to the groups that I was in when I came into the NAACP. I also was put into the anti-Klan network. So I traveled just as much with the anti-Klan network as I did with the

NAACP. You didn't know the difference. I was on the Rainbow Coalition, the NAACP, the SCLC, the anti-Klan network, they were tight. One of the groups was to monitor the Klan. With J.B. Stoner being in that school, although we didn't know that was heavy Klan area, and it being the mother area of the county, we didn't know that that was Klan area. Old Alabama, King led the Selma march in Alabama. That's just a street that you didn't get on. It carried its motto in its name. So I'm assuming that's why the governor met us there at that school, and there were so many media there. My sisters said at South Cobb they didn't have all that welcome. My other sister, Virginia, who was at Pebblebrook, said she didn't even have that welcome. You know, all those people were around them, but the four of us that went into that school had all of that around us. They introduced us to the staff, and there was a lady named Ms. Mims. She was our music teacher. She lived in the Buckhead area, and that was the mother that we were to go to. Mr. Holiday was also at that school as a black teacher, and so they were there to protect us. So they got us into different groups. Willie Griffin was one that lived in the Vinings area. You had folks that were there to make sure. We may have thought, well, it's cute for them to call us "nigger" and do this and that; they didn't take it cute. They knew how to watch out for us. I went from Lindley to Pebblebrook, and Pebblebrook was over at the old Pebblebrook circle. That was the high school, and I believe eventually they brought our bus driver on with us. For a while we didn't ride on the same bus that they rode on. We didn't ride on the same bus as white people did, and I think we had to keep walking. Our road was still dirt, so my dad swapped land and gave up a piece on the top of the hill, so Cobb County could put a road through there; but it still took time for that road to be paved.

TF: Could you explain the significance of you and the other three students going there?

MC: What do you mean? Well, we were the only black people in that area. Apparently, the schools were broken up into districts, and that's where our district would have been. It would have put us at Lindley Middle School which was on Old Alabama.

TF: Had that been an all-white school?

MC: Yes, all those schools were all white. All the schools in Mableton were all-white. The only schools that weren't all-white in Mableton were . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A  
START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

MC: Okay, the schools, you had Mt. Bethel and Green Grove. Those were the church schools. At Green Grove my great-grandfather, G.W. Felker, could not go to Green Grove. In life he was white. On his death certificate he was listed as a black man. But he was too bright to go to Green Grove because he was considered a black man. Now, what does that mean? I don't know. He worked as an accountant for the Ganns. All of the different ones in the Mableton area, he worked as an accountant. So he was just considered as a white man then or German or whatever color they consider, I don't know. But my uncle, who was John Porter, he was one of the wealthiest black men, I believe, in

the Cobb County area, I know in the Mableton-Austell area. The Riverside Elementary School is on the land that he owned. Green Grove Church was on the land that he owned also.

TF: At Lindley you were one of the first African-American students with three others?

MC: Right. We desegregated Lindley.

TF: Do you know right off what year that was?

MC: I've got the pictures from the yearbook, and the yearbook was 1969. In '68 there were no black people in the school system. The only school in south Cobb County that had any history was Lindley Middle School. That's where Sandra Ervin is the principal. She's the only one that had a yearbook. I went to Pebblebrook, and they did have the yearbook with Virginia's picture in it. That's how we knew when the schools desegregated. But as far as any written history, there is no written history. Susanne Ward and Bernice Beavers were the two students that desegregated Harmony Leland Elementary School. There is no history; there are no pictures; there is no book; there is nothing at that school. Virginia Ward was the first African-American student to graduate from Pebblebrook High School, and Pebblebrook High School last year did a dedication to her in their forty years. The lady that interviewed her said that they thought it was a lot of students. They didn't know it was only one girl that desegregated Pebblebrook and came out in the first class. She graduated in '69 in that first class.

TF: In Lindley did things finally calm down racially; you mentioned name-calling and that sort of thing.

MC: Well, that was the thing that, even on the football teams now they call each other, "That's my nigger right there." They still do that. They shouldn't, but they do. We didn't really know what racism was. It's funny, but the chief of police for Fulton County in the years that came was Chief Louis Graham, and I worked for Fulton County for a while. When I went to Douglass High School, they described me, and some of the others have been described, as color blind and that we were so embedded in racism it became a part of our lifestyle and that we didn't even know it. The anti-Klan network, Evelyn Newman who is in the district attorney's office of Fulton County now, said you don't even know what it is. So that's when I was educated on what racism was. We were like calling good bad, ugly good. In the school we were at, I was in the choir. Ms. Mills took us to my first movie, *Oliver Twist*. I remember it; never knew what a movie was; but she took us to the movie; and she would take us to her house. Her son would drive us on the school bus, and I had a crush on him because I didn't know what white guys were. He just went all out to do things for us, and he was so nice. But he was nice, not bad. They fed us when we went to the movie. We had popcorn; we had drinks; we were on top of the world. But I think the movie was to show us that there was a different lifestyle than what we were accustomed to. I don't know any of the teachers that did us wrong. I didn't have any problems. I never got in a fight. If I had gotten into a fight I was going to fight back.

Virginia has a different story, but Virginia was older, and Virginia went through a lot of abusive situations. I didn't have any problems.

TF: So overall you felt pretty safe there when you were in school?

MC: I did. I felt very safe in school. I didn't feel any need to be afraid to walk the halls. I didn't feel a need because I didn't know what civil rights was either; you have to remember that. We were raised around white people, going into their homes, and they sent food into our homes, but never were belittling statements made. Never were the white kid told you're lower than them. We didn't discuss black-white; you didn't discuss stuff like that. So when I went to my last two years of high school at Douglass High School, I had my first episode of something to happen. During the missing and murdered children, Nathaniel Cater [victim of Atlanta Child Murders] was related to my husband's family. When I went to school in the eleventh or twelfth grade, I worked at one of the hospitals, and there was a man there that was over security. Every day you'd get out of school at eleven or twelve o'clock and you'd go on to work. Well, this man was casing me, I'm assuming, and one day he came to the bus stop. I knew how to catch the bus and go home and come back to school; that's all I knew. When he came to my bus stop he said, "Well, I'm going to the job; where are you going?" He said, "So you can ride with me." And he talked to me a long time and he was over security, had on a uniform. So I saw no problem with me getting in the car with him in that little ol' dootle bug. I got in that car, and I remember he took me to 213 Fairburn Road, and he said, "Well, you can't sit in the car. You've got to go in the house with me. My wife has just fixed lunch, and once I eat my lunch we'll be back on the road." Because it's too dangerous to sit out there with missing and murdered children, all that stuff was getting ready to go on and a lot of stuff was happening, so I kind of believed him, he was right. I didn't need to sit out there. I don't know if Wayne Williams [Atlanta Child Murderer] did that or just what he did, but he was in the first class, and I was in the second class that came out of Douglass High School. I went into the house with the man. This lady got me from the back, and they tied me in this chair. I don't know what else happened after that. I don't know if I passed out. I don't have any idea. And the reason I tell you that is to show you how we were very protected. I was very dumb, and so I didn't know a lot of things. We went to school. We didn't have to worry about somebody going to get me behind the back and do this and do that. You trusted the officers, you trusted the staff. That's the way we were brought up. I was sent home if my skirt was up too high or had on makeup, and my daddy beat me. I was sent back home from Pebblebrook High School. You were trained how to dress, how to look, how to carry yourself as a female, and to trust the staff that was around you because the staff wasn't there to hurt you. That's what I was taught. So when I got in the big city I thought that you were to trust the same way, but I just learned that it was different. So that would describe to you how it was in the country versus city life, and I think most folks that you will talk to will tell you the same thing.

TF: Tell us about your house in Mableton. We're going to fast-forward here to the shooting. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

MC: Well, in '79 I was working at the bank and wanted a house. My dad died in '78, and I really wanted to build a house on the land which had been given to us as heir property, but it didn't work that way. I bought a house from the Thompson group, Sally and her son, Robert Thompson, Jr., who was on the board at Georgia State Bank. My husband and I built a house from the ground up, and he was building on Mt. Pisgah Road. We said, "Okay, we'll build there." I was working on a lot of programs with the NAACP. Fair Share was the main program that we had started working on. I was working with Marsha Burasky, with Metro Fair Housing and working with FHA's regional director. So there were a lot of folks that were always in line and in place working with Albert Love. He was with the SCLC. He was with the Amalgamated Transit Union. So there were a lot of folks around me. A lot of folks thought that because I worked with the NAACP, and I didn't even get into NAACP for that, and I worked with the southeast regional NAACP, they thought I was an Uncle Tom for coming into Cobb County. Sometimes, when you challenge the system, you're looked at as a troublemaker. My thoughts were never challenged. I could care less about the system being challenged. I didn't know what civil rights were in that sense of speaking. I began with the southeast regional NAACP as a volunteer in '74 because my mother had been dealing with the cotton mill. and I felt an allegiance to the NAACP to give something back because they had helped my mother with all the discrimination problems that she had had and all the people there had had. They [the mill management] actually attacked the lower income white people more than they did the black people, but my mother stood up for all the people.

TF: This is at the mills?

MC: At the mills. At Whittier Mill, they attacked the white folks more than the black folks, but they laid my mother off because my mother was speaking up and doing something. Again, I didn't know that much about civil rights. I didn't know what she was doing, but it felt like she was doing the right thing, and so when I got in '74 I felt like I needed to give them something back for what they gave to my mom. So in '79 when I literally got involved, I talked to Robert Flanagan. He was state conference president and Jandell Johnson was with the Atlanta branch. Julian Bond was the president, but you really thought Jandell Johnson was the president. She was the executive director. I knew that we needed a Cobb County office, but we needed an executive director like that lady. Jandell was an awesome woman. She was a rock. That woman was too much. She was an educator. Right at '79-'80 I began to talk to Lee Partain. He was the president of Georgia State Bank. I was telling Mr. Partain I wanted a house, but I knew that we didn't have the income, and we didn't know anything about buying a house, the qualifications you have to have, and all that stuff. Mr. Partain took the time to teach us. We had cars and everything, and he began to teach us as far as how to get our credit to qualify for a house. I was in the mortgage department and. I was the first person to be hired in the mortgage department at the bank, and they would not teach us anything. Mr. Partain was there to tell me, you just sit there on that job. If they don't teach you, you just sit there. White people were very insecure with their jobs too during that time, and you're bringing a black person and putting that black person up there. I was among the first ones to work in the bank, so we had folks that would tell me or would try to help you. We had a

preacher that was up there. He was a courier, an older black gentleman, and he said, "Just stay there; don't move. Mr. Partain is going to teach you; he's going to help you." And he did.

I worked with Lee and my husband on getting a house, and Mr. Thompson was on the board. Mr. Thompson owned that land that he was building. So that's where my house came through him. I was working with Fair Share, and Fair Share was working with Community Reinvestment. The Community Reinvestment Act says give back to the community, teach the community how to get loans. You can cut those interest rates. It can do a lot of stuff through Community Reinvestment. You're reinvesting back into the area that has built your bank and that has brought the money into your bank. When the Fair Share program came through, by that time Ms. Hurley was sick, and Mr. Flanagan was the acting regional director until they could get Ms. Hurley a replacement, which was going to be Earl T. Shinhoster, the regional director. I wanted a house, and it appeared that the timing was economic and development and the timing was, "Mary, you want a house; go to Marietta and get that branch back operating. Get some help, and then we can deal with trying to help you get a house and others get a house too." I did not know that much about NAACP, but white people did. The bank was going through a phase of they were getting ready to sell Georgia State Bank to First Union. I can remember when I started talking about a house there was a man named Jim. He told me that, "You're never going to get a raise in this job. There is nothing for you here; you will never go anywhere in banking." So that would cut me out from getting a house. But Mr. Partain was always there to help.

Doing the house I also began to do Fair Share and the NAACP. That wasn't a good match to bring in to a predominately white hometown bank. That scared bankers because we were dealing with banking. We signed the first financial agreement nationwide. We sat at the Burger King on Gordon Road in Mableton, and I wrote what was to go into that contract of Fair Share to present it to Mr. Partain. Mr. Partain was going to present it to the board of directors. Before that bank merged over to First Union Bank, different ones were taking their stockholders already out of the bank and they were taking their retirement already out. So to sign that Fair Share Agreement was really a plus for First Union to have such an umbrella sitting over them. But when we moved into the house I don't know what had to do with what. I just know I was working with Fair Share. Earl had made me the chairperson over that program because we still didn't have a charter to Cobb County, so any work that we did had to be done out of the regional office, and I had to chair that committee. It would appear that there was no control over controlling the regional office with the white community. It made them fearful. You're asking for our money for us to give back to black people, and on both sides there was a lot of heat going on there. You had L.R. Byrd, you had Fred Rasheed who was over economic and development, and you had Mickey Westmoreland who was chairman of the board with Georgia State Bank, and Lee Partain, and you had Dr. [Benjamin] Hooks sitting here. Although I didn't know the indepthness of the negotiations, it wasn't going like whatever this side wanted more and that side wanted whatever. I wasn't involved in that conversation of it. The directors took it from there. We moved into the house. The heat was going on there, but the heat was also about my house, and we didn't know it.

There was a boy that came to my son, Allen, Jr.—Allen was thirteen—and he said, “Tell your mom and your dad, we want y’all to be at home on such and such a night, and we want you to be there at such and such a time.” So we thought that they wanted to welcome us to the community. We were at the house. I was in the bedroom, and Allen and the boys were up in the front of the house in the living room in that area of the house, and they were in that side of the house. I was with the Rainbow Coalition. I was with Operation Push. I was with, just different groups. But we did what Allen told us, and at the time that they were to welcome us I was on the phone talking to Dover Ferrell from up in Marietta. We were still working on the Fair Share getting everything set up. I remember Allen said something and he said, “They just shot into the house; those were bullets!” It was twenty-six rounds that just splattered the door. The door was a metal door, and the metal door is what slowed the bullets down. There was a man named Mr. Norrell that lived across the street who was a former police officer out of Austell, and that’s when I first encountered police officers and really learned what police officers were. I had worked around sheriffs when I worked in the bank, but I didn’t connect it. The man who lived next door to us was out in his yard he said, and he told my ex-husband what he saw.

Mr. Norrell gave my ex-husband a gun to fight back. Don’t just sit there! Mr. Norrell timed us moving in to that house. He told us, “Y’all had to come from XYZ street because it takes you so long to load a truck and so long to get to that house and bring those loads in. He knew everything about a lot of things. He was a very smart gentleman, but he was sick, and his bed was right there in the front room at that window, so anything that happened on that street, he knew it. So he became friend with my ex-husband, and he told him what he saw. Mr. Norrell has always said that it was no redneck person that shot into the house. He knew who it was that shot into the house. Mr. Norrell had cancer, two of his lungs. Then we bought a fence to put up because we weren’t going to move. To us, that was not a reason to move. That’s telling me to run; that was not a reason. So the boys and Allen backed me. They knew I was in the NAACP. They knew I was an executive person with the NAACP. The Amalgamated Transit Union and the SCLC, Albert Love and the Amalgamated Transit Union, and Fair Share had a few people there that were with us. The Muslims were definitely there behind us. The anti-Klan network got involved. A lot of people got involved with us. Xenophon was standing right behind the door. The door went straight to the wall, and apparently they already knew the inside of that house. I don’t feel that they thought that somebody would be behind that door. Xenophon had a pet, and he was standing there playing with it with his dad, and they were bending over. That is the only reason it didn’t take off the top of their bodies because I was on the bed and you could see me through the curtain, and Mr. Norrell said that they pulled in the yard and shot. They didn’t just at random drive down the street and shoot. They pulled in the yard and shot into the house.

TF: Did they ever catch the people that did it?

MC: No.

TF: Even though Mr. Norrell said he knew who did it.

MC: Mr. Norrell said he knew who did it. We didn't move. I didn't feel that white people were better than me, and I didn't feel I was better than them. I didn't feel anything. I definitely couldn't buy into that we lived on a white street. I couldn't buy that one. My sons were the first two African-American students that went to Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church School. There we learned about the day school where moms drop off the children for a few hours during the week, and Sollie C. Cole [a dairy farmer and Cobb school board member in the 1960s and early 1970s] got my children into that. So we were active in the community. They played at Wallace Park. But I remember Louis Graham saying on the radio—he was chief of police in Fulton County—and he said, “Mary doesn't understand what racism is.” He was saying something to that effect that, “She won't accept racism because she grew up in that area, and so race is beyond her comprehension of seeing that there are race relation problems.” Others said the same thing. I thought J.B. Stoner was stupid being in the school, and I still don't know why he came to their school.

I met with Ed Fields [a local white supremacist]. They said the Klan shot into our house, and so it bothered me. I had heard a lot about David Duke from over in New Orleans. David Duke was the head of the group over there, and he ran for office. I understand Ed's feelings were over the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, whatever he was over, but it was the KKK and so I wanted to meet with him. I wanted to know, why did he shoot into our house? Every white person I knew you could go up and talk to them. Then we didn't even know. We didn't even use terms like that. So I met with Mr. Fields. He agreed. At that time we had some more men on board [in the NAACP], Mack Eppinger, Oscar Freeman, Dover Ferrell, Bonney Christian, Reverend Byrd from up in Kennesaw, and they opposed my meeting with Mr. Fields. So we set up the meeting. The meeting was held at the corner of Lemon Street and Waddell Street [near Zion Baptist Church]. They didn't take kindly; they didn't even want him to come in the church. I just wanted to talk to the man! I asked him, “Did y'all shoot into my house? Because you almost killed my son; I want to know.” He said that they did not. He had on a white shirt. He was a tall man. He's a doctor [chiropractor], and I think he's still in Cobb County. He said, “We don't do that kind of stuff. That ain't the type how we are.” And he had on a suit, and he said, “I promise you we didn't shoot into your house.” I kind of believed that man by what he told me when he came to meet me. I guess everybody had discussed he didn't need to put on a suit, just a plain shirt. Bonney and Dover and others went out with me. They stood there, and I did all the talking, and I talked to him. I want to think that Oscar was with us, and not a lot of us went out there to the street to talk to him, but that was my wish. I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to know, did he shoot into my house.

Everybody seemed to think that, well, she doesn't have a brain to know what racism is, but I had a brain to know people's talk. They told me that your word is your bond. We didn't have papers to sign. We had handshakes. We talked to folks to find out, now, what's your problem? Why have you got a problem hating me? You don't even know me. That's the way I was brought up. When he told me that, from then on that is what I believed. He said he didn't do it, and then another name of someone that worked with us

was given to me, and that was the person that possibly did it because that person did threaten me. Now that's the first encounter that I had face to face with a person with racism. He told me straight up, we were nothing, us black folks were not important, we were nothing, and he was a sheriff. He scared me. It's so ironic because Mr. Norrell said the same folks that he said that did it came out of that same place up in Austell that he was talking about. So whether they did it or not I don't know. But that's how my house got shot into. My children don't know; they were as dumb as we were! They don't know about racism because again my son said, "Mom, somebody came up to the car," and I told you what he said as far as when they came up to the car, and he said, he didn't know anything about black and white. Xenophon didn't know anything about black and white. They were shocked. It was just ironic to us that our property was on the backside of Lindley where we went to school, and in the time that came, I learned that our house was not the first that was shot into on that street. Miss Inez, her house was shot into on that street at that corner house, and she was a black woman that had moved on that street. Dr. [Thomas A.] Scott wrote about another person that was on Old Alabama, so it must have been that area or something, but they assured me the Klan did it, but I don't know.

TF: How do you feel about relationships between the races today? What is left to be done?

MC: It's still a little hard for me to evaluate that because when it came down to getting a job, when it came down to going in to a segregated place, I was not brought up around the segregation, so it was hard for me to evaluate it. I was brought up believing if you put yourself to it, wherever you go, you can get it. But I learned that that was not the truth. But it never has been embedded in me that that can't be. I have a problem more with that inner circle because the inner circle can blackball you when they want to. If you do things that they don't like they can spoil your name. I have more problem with that than civil rights issues. Now that's how I feel with it because most places that I wanted to go I've always had a good personality and could get where I wanted to get to. But that buddy system is a bad thing in a black race and a white race, a Hispanic race or any race because if they sell you downstream you can't get anything. You won't know where it's coming from. Naturally we have come a long ways as far as we were integrated into the school system. I didn't know that that was a problem. I thought it was just the way it was supposed to be. That's embedded. As far as we've always gone to church, we did not see white people, but I never thought that they were any different than me. If I wanted to marry one, I never thought any different. Okay, but I know now that there was a difference, and there were certain things you couldn't do. I think that came from my family upbringing that there was no difference, but when our house got shot into, and I guess the Lord had to let me see that to say, "Mary, there is a difference; there is a problem out here." So I guess that's how I felt about it. I did a lot of stuff, been on a lot of boards, and telling me I was black didn't stop it because I guess I didn't know that. I always thought I was Mary.

END OF INTERVIEW

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 30  
Interview with Mary Ward Cater  
Conducted by Erin Sandlin  
Friday, 6 November 2009

ES: Hello, Ms. Cater. Thank you so much for interviewing with me today. To get started, in the interest of context, please tell me a little bit about where you were born, grew up and went to school.

MC: I was born in Northwest Atlanta in an area called Scott's Crossing where my great-grandfather lived. The community was named after him because of so much that he donated back to the community. I was reared in south Cobb County, Mableton, and we lived between both places, Scott's Crossing and Mableton, which were somewhat connected and had a lot of the same elected officials and such as that. My father's grandfather bought property in south Cobb County about 1827, somewhere in there. My mother's grandfather owned property in northwest Atlanta, which was called the Rescue Home.

ES: If you could just describe generally your community, providing any other details you feel pertinent. We did touch on that.

MC: Both communities that I grew up in were the same way in a sense of speaking. In the Scott's Crossing community it was like a rescue home. For my mother's family, we had the church which was Springfield Missionary Baptist Church and Aaron Tabernacle Church which was the church school. Aaron's Tabernacle was the first church school, and I do have old newspapers from back then. Before desegregation time that's where they went to school. When I went to school I was able to go into a regular school.

ES: They being your parents' generation and the generation before that?

MC: Correct. The difference in Scott's Crossing and Cobb County is Cobb had not desegregated. Scott's Crossing wasn't desegregated, but I think desegregation came about somewhere in '68 or '69 because when we literally went into the school system in Cobb County, we went to white schools in 1969. But in 1961 or '62 I went to elementary school at William J. Scott School which was in northwest Atlanta. Northwest Atlanta and Cobb County were almost the same community. As I interview it makes sense to me that our parents didn't talk race talk to us; they didn't talk desegregation talk to us; we were very uneducated in race relations, never heard of race relations. The more I talk about it, just thinking about white people, I don't think I ever knew what that was. People were people. There was never a difference in our home about the race of people, so I guess that's why I never could understand; it's just like I'm just getting an education in why I didn't know then. In Cobb County my great-grandfather, G.W. Felker, couldn't attend Green Grove Elementary School nor could he attend Little Bethel in Mableton—those were the two black church schools—because he was considered a white man. But

on his death certificate he's buried as a black man. My great-grandfather got our own private cemetery. When he bought land he built a community around us where we never had to reach outside of our circle. We had our land, our cattle, our sharecropping; we had our cemeteries if somebody died. We had our preachers. Why did they do that? I don't know. I can't tell you why they set up my people, my grandparents, and it filtered down, why they set up such a shield around us which is just something that I actually did go into civil rights. Because I was not raised knowing what civil rights was even about.

ES: That's very interesting. I think just to pause it for a second and put this out there, perhaps you were raised in that community with a sense of civil rights just ingrained in the way you were treated, people are people.

MC: I think that my view of it is both of my great-grandfathers were considered white. At William J. Scott Elementary School until I started doing the background of history with them on Reverend William J. Scott they never knew what color he was. There's not a picture in that school now. They thought he was a white man, and when we came forth and said we are his great-grandchildren, just last year, it has shocked them. It's like you can't be because he was white. But my mother was his granddaughter, so in the Cobb County area the same thing happened. My great-grandfather worked for the Ganns; he worked for the Bogazans. When we did the project on the history of the Mable house they gave me a little green poster card for a John Porter. I didn't want to do history on John Porter because number one I wasn't raised on doing history, okay, and I got a lot of insults. The insults were, she doesn't want to know what her background is or what her history is. Well, I wasn't raised that way. I was very comfortable in the setting that I was in. I never wanted for things. I was not abused, I was not misused. My family was very comfortable. My great-grandfather left us what was needed to produce and to become, if I can use this word, wholesome citizens. So his being white border, a German, partial German, he was accepted as a white man, but when it came down to dying he was put down as a black man. Maybe he shielded it. Maybe both of those great-grandfathers shielded us. I'm glad you asked that question because as I sit here right now comparing over in Scott's Crossing, my mother's family has a family cemetery. Nobody in the community has to worry about where they can be buried. The cemetery is there, the school is there, the community is there. In Cobb County my other great-grandfather, the same thing. I've got over 150-something great-nieces and nephews, 67 nieces and nephews, and nobody has to worry about where they're going to be buried. They paved the way.

ES: That strikes me as part of why you really didn't question civil rights growing up because in my experience civic racism and racial policies are focused on devaluing a certain population and robbing them of their cultural identity. So you had that, and your great-grandfathers set up that community, so you had that very tight nucleus of identity.

MC: And I did. In all my born days, I felt that a white person has no more rights than I have, and I have no more rights than they have. And I never felt that they have a job that I can't have too. I have never felt that. I have been called stupid. I have been told that the

racism was imbedded there, and I was blind to seeing it. But I just wasn't raised that way.

ES: How do you remember your first encounter with the issues of the civil rights campaign? Can you provide any details? How old were you?

MC: I can. I can tell you exactly how old I was. My mother had been laid off from Whittier Cotton Mill, and I didn't clearly understand what was going on. The mill was going through a transition in the late 1960s, early 1970s, and it was unsafe working conditions. My mother died with cotton lungs, which is called black lungs in the upper mountains. It's when it goes into the lungs. It can't come out. They laid my mom off, but my mom had fourteen children, so the black and white community, when you messed with my mom you messed with the wrong community because when you had children you didn't mess with folks with children. Okay, even white folks don't take kindly to you messing with children. They approached the NAACP, Mrs. Ruby Hurley, and they came to my mother's rescue, and they filed suits, and they started dealing with those unsafe working conditions for lower income whites and black people. A low-income white person versus a black person was no different. And just kind of backing up just a second with that, in the NAACP, I wanted to meet with Mr. [Ed] Fields. I wanted to ask him, why did you shoot at my house? I did not understand that because I've worked with white people that didn't have anything, and they were no different than us that didn't have anything that was African-American, so when my mother, back to that, worked with unsafe working conditions, the NAACP may not mean to others what it means to me. The first thing that was taught to me was the name, what does NAACP mean? National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Even when I began to work with it, Advancement of Colored People did not mean black folks to me; it meant colored people, people of color. It meant, okay, yes, the black people were more abused, but if you look at the lady that went to bat and got there and started it, she was a white woman, so even with that focus I never had the racist mentality. Because I worked with racial stuff it was always thought that I was racist. You're going to always be branded in that sense. Mrs. Hurley and Merlene Murray and Merdice Wyatt, they were the secretaries. Robert Flanagan was the state president. Jandell Johnson was the Atlanta chapter, executive director. Julian Bond was the president. Okay, they meant to shut those mills down or correct them from people dying who can't breathe—you're dying with that cotton going down your lungs; give them the proper tools to use. So my first encounter with the NAACP was my mother. They laid her off that morning at that mill. They were upset that she was the leading person fighting with civil rights to get better working conditions. Lockheed, Bell Bomber plant had brought her up there, trained her how to run the machines, and they would not let my mother run a machine at Whittier Cotton Mill. My great-grandfather was William Scott who was around seventy-ish, no, back in the days, it was 1934 when they brought him into Whittier Cotton Mil. Well, my mother was just getting married in 1934 and working at Whittier Cotton Mill. I say a Mr. Scott, J.J. Scott I think his name was, that they brought in. If he was related I don't know. But I felt because they helped my mom so and I was a little girl and it was right before Dr. King died, I had seen the pictures when John F. Kennedy died in '63 and I didn't understand, why did they kill that man. Then I saw the pictures, they closed schools, we had to sit there and look at when

Dr. Martin Luther King died. When they laid my mom off right afterward a tanker was coming down Bolton Road; my mother was supposed to be at that spot when that tanker got there. When that tanker blew up another lady got killed, not my mom. I felt, and didn't even know why, I owed the NAACP something back because they helped my mom. My mom was the breadwinner; she worked and held the public job in the family. My dad had his business, so you needed both of those incomes, and they got her on social security, they helped her to get some benefits when they laid her off at the mill. I was the thirteenth child and I just felt, I need to give them something back for helping my mom.

ES: That brings us to an interesting point, talking about you parents' work situation. I'd like you to explore the gender norms in the community. What roles did women and men fill, married and unmarried men and women, and how did this change during the civil rights era and afterwards? Do you remember any big changes in how men and women interacted?

MC: I was reared in Holiness, the Pentecostal Church, and I think it was this way everywhere. Women's roles were in the house, in the home, having children. You worked, okay, because it took two to work, not like today where it takes two because you've overextended yourselves; then both needed to work. Most of the time the African-American man sharecropped or had some kind of farm or had something that they were doing, and the women had that public job. As far as us moving out into the community to run for office, the only woman I knew that was like that was Ruby Hurley, the southeast regional director. I was so overwhelmed with that woman and how she went out. Women worked behind the scenes, and I've always seen white women do that. The most powerful white women that I've seen—their husbands are high up; a woman is sitting behind them. I worked with the Democratic women, and I worked with the Republican women in the club. These women, all of their husbands have positions, but this is the powerhouse behind them. The concept that I learned is a woman does her job in the home; that's how we were taught. A lot of these women were taught the same way. We were not out in the open. Even in the church you didn't find women that were pastors. I'm in the Church of God in Christ now. It's over 100-something years old. We don't have women pastors that are certified on record through the church as a pastor. It is always a man. So that mentality, old traditions have always been in my head because that's the way it was. My father drank, and when I was little, maybe up to about two or three years old, he drank alcohol, and he would abuse my mom. You took it. You took it. You did not, you just took it. The marriage was a bond that you stayed through that. I've worked in the court of law now. You don't take stuff like that now. He stopped, but back in the days when they had, there was no treatment for them like they have the AA meetings. And if they had had them back then, things would have been different. So our role was in the house. We were groomed, trained, for certain jobs. Until I got into the 9 to 5 I never knew that a woman could climb a telegram post. So it was different.

ES: So do you feel that the civil rights campaign had an impact on the change in gender roles in the community or do you feel that it was coming from another source?

MC: No, the civil rights, during the civil rights time you came forth with—I do a program called Women in History. That’s not an old, old program that came forth; I think it came through in the 1960s in the civil rights time. Well, women began to get honor and recognition. As far as myself, I believe that God put me before I’d done many things and what you see on my bio, I’ve done it all, because I believe that He knew I had a background from two different great-grandfathers which were educators. Even if I don’t have a master’s degree I’m always out there teaching. I believe you should teach. I believe you should teach women that we can have greater—we can run the house and matter on the outside also. It definitely came through civil rights.

ES: So it’s definitely very closely related. How do you remember the community responding to the first women who acquired positions of authority? Did it conform or was it radically different from that attitude of your community, which you described a little bit in the last question?

MC: I’ll give you one or two examples. When they would describe my mom standing out there dealing with the mill situation it would be normally you said “Mr.” and “Mrs.,” whatever that husband’s name was. The media had a way of saying “Mrs. Thelma Ward” and “Mr. Samuel Ward.” That belittled a black man. When my home got shot into and I saw it straight up, it intimidated my ex-husband. It was Mrs. Cater’s home got shot into, her children, and I remember Earl Shinhoster came forth, and the NAACP southeast regional office kept me going to conventions; they kept me in different classes; and I mean, that beating down of that mentality of no, I was a chicken when it came to a woman stepping out into the open. I was not trained that way. I was trained that a woman’s place was in the home. A woman’s place in church is sitting in the back, not ever the pulpit. I don’t go to pulpits fast even this day and time. I always push a man up before me. Everybody that’s around me in the court system know Mary ain’t going to push herself up as a woman too fast. As far as holding—my first time in 1980 when we held the election at Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ on Fowler Circle, Mr. Flanagan came out, and he said they had given us permission to hold an election for us to get that Marietta chapter back up. I was elected as the president to get that charter back on the books. The three things that we had to do were so closely related, being elected as the president was only for a brief period. It had nothing to do with going out into the community. We had to do some paperwork. We had to reactive that NAACP chapter in Marietta. You can’t have another chapter with another functioning chapter or a chapter that’s already in the county. You have to get that one functioning, then it changed from Marietta/Cobb NAACP, then it changed to just the Cobb County branch of the NAACP in the years that came.

ES: And when was that; do you remember precisely?

MC: In ’81 we were still functioning as Marietta/Cobb and down the road somewhere like between late ’81 and ’82 we were granted permission. It may have been way over in ’82 that we were granted the permission that officially we took the Marietta part off, but it took a lot of fights to do so. In some of the letters that I have that came from the national office, you know, here's one, it says, “Your letter addressed to the same concern

expressed in several other communications . . . .” We had 113 members and on here it tells about how there was “a charge that had been filed against the president of the offices of the Marietta branch alleging that they are guilty of not performing their duties as described in the constitution and by-laws, for branches associate”—okay, that’s not the part I want, I want to—in November of 1980 we had put in, “I refer to our request by you on behalf of 113 members to be granted a charter in the name of Cobb County branch.” We were denied. That was November of 1980. All the way over into ’81 we were denied. But it also says here that, “The association does not solve a leadership problem in a branch by chartering another unit in the same area.” We had to first resolve the issue with Marietta in order to get to a Cobb County branch of the NAACP. But what was felt as far as me being a woman, Mr. [William H.] Penn [NAACP director, Branch and Field Services] said to me when we went to Jackson, Mississippi in ’83, he said—it was cute—he said, “I’m glad to meet you.” We were laughing. He said, “I thought you were a fat tiger.” And he said—because we had to do some forceful letters, we had to do some forceful communication down to the point of we will get an attorney to get this issue resolved because we need a branch out here. Even in the black section of the NAACP it was a fight when a woman stepped up to the plate.

At our home in Mableton, and I even had to learn and see what was going on, they would say “her home”; they would say, “Mrs. Cater, executive board member of the NAACP and Mr. Cater.” I had to learn to say “ours” because “my” is offensive. Earl Shinhoster sent me to a convention in Dade County, Florida, and I had to pay, but it was reclining our men and boys back to society. They felt the impact on it. Well, we came through with the women in the NAACP. That was a time women got tired. We were doing the work, but we were not looked at as doing the work, so I can tell you both sides of the fence in how we were thought of. Was it belittling? I have no idea. I don’t know because my mind doesn’t go to belittling stuff. It goes to resolving that issue.

When we wrote the contract with Georgia State Bank even to singing that Fair Share agreement I set up everything. When we went to the Cobb Chamber—[Chamber executive director] Phil Sanders worked with us—I set up every meeting. But I always had to sit on the back burner. Dover, Earl, Oscar, I had to push them ahead of me. It was a mentality, and I didn’t take it personally because it wasn’t for me personal. We were working for the mass of folks, so in some strong women’s minds you had to know what you were up against and be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. It was okay to be on the back burner as long as we got the job done. When we did the grass roots program here, Bob Waymer who was an educator with Fulton County and we did a grass roots organization it named Mary in here but it also named another man too. That was a thing of how it had to be. I got that feeling of when Mrs. Flanagan told me, you’ve been elected as president, the 113 members, over half of them met us at Triumph Church. We held the election and I won the election and I said to them, “You know a woman can’t have this position, not right now. We need a man in this position.” Jerry Dodd had come in at the time and he was elected secretary and I said, “What if we could switch positions and I be the secretary”—that is how he was groomed and he would be the president. Mr. Flanagan said no. Mr. Flanagan said, “We’re going to leave it as it is until we can get that charter back on the books. Your name is the one that’s flying up in Dr. Hooks’

office and Mr. Penn and Mr. Gibson and all those offices right there.” And so it was a matter of paperwork that we leave it as it was to get the charter back on the books. Then whatever we did from that standpoint, do it there. When my house got shot into it brought about another fear in me because I knew being in south Cobb County, close to Powder Springs where the motherhood of the Klan was, that a diehard mentality there would cause something would happen. My husband and my children, being men were going to think that I put them in danger. But yet I never feared to know my job was the mass of people. I hope that answered some of your question.

ES: It does, very well. When was your house shot into again, just for the record?

MC: It was in 1983.

ES: So that was right after you got the NAACP chapter re-established.

MC: The Marietta, right. Plus, it was during a time that, see, the NAACP wasn't an island by itself. Joe Tucker from Federal Housing was definitely right there with us. Marsha Burasky, Metro Fair Housing was educating me on that end. Evelyn Newman, the anti-Klan network, and that whole office was educating me on that end. The United Methodist Church had me on another end. There were people that were there even down to Louis Farrakhan and the Muslims, the Amalgamated Transit Union, Reverend Orange, Albert Love, the SCLC, Reverend Osborne, I had enough support around me that was saying, and open-minded men that were saying, “Don't be scared. Let's just do the work.” So from that support the mentality came, and I believe to this day that's why my home was shot into. “She won't come down. She won't be fearful.” Although I was fearful. So we've got to move a step beyond this. And they were involved in liberating women. You had Marsha Burasky, a Jewish woman that was very heavy, you will not take down, you will not move. And they dealt with my private fears. When I can lean on them and say I'm scared, my children don't know what's going on. And when my home was fired on, it came through my oldest son, Allen, Jr. They told him at school, “Tell your family to be at home.” And down the road this man hated him all the way through. He worked with the man on a job, when he got grown and the man would just treat him so nasty, then finally the man told him that, “I was the classmate in school with you that gave you that message. I lived in the community with you.” Now he was twenty-something years old and the man is telling him, “I'm that man and I hated you.” But that's the man that told my son to tell us to be home that night. My children were not taught into racism so my mind is, I can't conceive how he ignorantly handled the situation. He said, “Mom, they said be home.” But he could have got killed. So that's the mother/woman side of us that fear such as that.

ES: Touching on that, we talked a little bit about it with the way the press handles your position and the positions of other women of authority. How do you feel that the professional and political changes in the roles of women have impacted the personal sphere, the family center?

MC: Ask me again.

ES: Dealing with the family, how have these changes in the way women are employed in the community and in the public eye, how have they altered how things go on at home between men and women, do you think?

MC: Well, for those of us that were brought up in strict religions, it hasn't changed a whole lot, but even in our churches I see older women that have stepped up to the plate. They're educating the bishops and the different ones on this is a new day. We're not trying to go over you. We're trying to bring in more modern things. I remember with the media, if there hadn't been a Monica Kaufman [Pearson] and Joselyn Dorsey [of WSB-TV]—I have a letter here from Zinona Clayton, power houses. Zinona was with CBN or TBN or whatever it was. Zinona Clayton wrote me a letter and commended me on the stand. Those were women that had—I think Zinona's husband may have been a judge; I know Monica's husband was a judge; those women didn't back away; they didn't back down; but they were moral supports, not bosom buddies but there to make sure that you had to stay in the news to keep that protection around you, especially in these rural areas. I ran rural areas where they were shutting down the farms in south Georgia, where things happened.

One of the things Marsha Burasky said to me, she said, "If you ever get in the secret part of it, that secret place where you get scared, and you just start dealing with it by yourself, that's a dangerous area. You have to stay out in the open." I learned to do that. I learned that the media was a protection for us. When Monica showed up the night we were talking to the law—it has offended folks when I really tell you the truth; we didn't get the support as far as what was needed to investigate our home; it was not there—but on the same night when I got Monica on that phone and the media showed up and she got them out there, we had people in place to help you when you were in racist situations and such as that. The media was our protection. When Monica came, and when Cynthia Tucker of the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* and those folks came and got a little bit of you into the media, it was a protection for you. But then the media covered it going back to how they would say Mary Cater's home; my husband was the breadwinner; my husband paid the bills. When you insult a black man in that sense it makes you think, that tears up the home on the inside. So you're fighting with civil rights and home issues. A lot of times that's the way it was. My children won't run with me now because they say, "Mama they have you everywhere fighting civil rights." So it was—and then I ran for office, so it's different.

ES: I think that's definitely an important issue to attend to with these decades after integration, looking at how the home life is affected by the politics and the public activity because if there's no safe place for you to be, it tears down the efforts that you make in progressing towards more equality.

MC: What do you mean?

ES: If you don't have any safe harbor, a place you can go or be and just be quiet, you know, your church or your family home or something, then it wears on you; you're burning the candle at both ends.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

ES: So you were saying when you ran for office the first time?

MC: When I ran for office the first time in '86 and our house was shot into in '83, my mother, that was the first time ever that she came out and went to an event, one event, with me. I knew that she was with me, but a woman's place was in the home. She went to Zion Baptist Church with me to let me know I'm with you, but religiously our belief is the woman's place is in the home, and that's the way we believed. Many times in the church—I'm an evangelist in the church, and I had three men to go up against my license. For nine years I sat as an aspiring missionary, and the pastor in Austell, Pastor Roy Hardin, Sr., [Tabernacle Church of God in Christ] said, "You are straight up an evangelist. Evangelist means the highways and the byways; you're out in the field. I'm in prisons, I'm here, and I'm there." That's the first man that ever said that to me, so the mentality was very heavy. When I went into the federal penitentiary in 1974 with Ruby Hurley, Ms. Hurley was a rock; that woman was awesome. She would scare you; women just didn't do stuff. She came I think from [Washington, D.C., and opened the NAACP southeastern regional office in 1951. She played a central role in the investigation of major cases such as the Emmett Till murder in Mississippi in 1955]. Those people from Mississippi weren't cowards; they were out front women. The women I know came from other areas, other states. They sure didn't come from here! But Mrs. Hurley took me into the federal prison, so the education I got was a street education. Going to those conventions—that's why I believe in training. I believe in going to the meetings. I get it when I go to those meetings. She took me to the federal prison. I guess it was over 1,000 men—I started with the NAACP in the prison chapters, not in local chapters. That's where the power was. Our men were in jail; they were in the prisons. She took me in there. They were teachers. They were educated men. Oh my gosh, when you sat in an NAACP meeting in the prison, you ain't seen nothing until you sit in a prison NAACP meeting. It is so professional.

We took the GED programs. Ruby Taylor from Kennesaw was the only teacher we knew in Cobb County. They said, "Mary go find a teacher. Go out there and get GED programs going into the prison." What the court systems are doing now, because I worked for Judge [James] Bodiford, they're ordering you to get GED's. In 1974 we were doing GED's in the prison. What we called for in the prison system was to educate our men and women—the GED program, a school program, even down to the election processes—we started it all at the federal prisons. Reidsville, Phillips State prison [Gwinnett County], Milledgeville, I went into the worst of prisons, and I had to go sometimes by myself. Mrs. Hurley didn't accept you being a coward. You cannot be scared. Then I worked with Ms. Frances Pauley. I worked with some powerful white

women. Ms. Frances Pauley was a lobbyist [for the Georgia Poverty Rights Organization and the Georgia Council on Human Relations], the most powerful woman in the state of Georgia at that time. You just couldn't be a coward with the Mayor's House and those Catholic churches. You had to get out there. My surroundings tore down a lot of my fear, and sometime in the church I was looked at as rebellious because I went outside of the circle of I can't run for office.

ES: How did you reconcile these two worlds that you were moving in? These two very, very different spheres that you were moving in, the very public, political sphere working for the NAACP, working in the prisons and in the public eye, and then being a member of your church that did not necessarily always support women who were bumptious?

MC: Maybe God did it. Becoming a missionary evangelist put me pretty much in the same position as with the NAACP. I still do civil rights. I think I'm a different evangelist missionary. I'm in the prisons. I don't have a lot of folks going to the prisons with me. I think that to keep my home together, I had to back up just a tad bit, and to stay in grace with the church [I had to] tone it down a little bit. Now the white men had a way of making you be a trouble maker, which you don't want to be branded as a trouble maker. That's a media thing. They know how to keep you going or bring you down to bring you out of the media. I had to deal with all of those mentalities. So what I did was to get it on paper. I began to go about it a different way. We came up with the grass roots organization. Bob Waymer wrote this paper, and I had to push Oscar and Dover to the forefront. It's okay for a woman to have the brain to do it, but if that's the way it was that's the way it was. Had to push whoever we needed to push up because you've got to always kept it in mind it ain't about you.

Senator Steve Thompson talked to me once and told me about the mass of people. Roy Barnes, they explained what it meant, the masses of people, versus you. So I had to come up with a plan to help the mass of people. It wasn't about me. That's how I dealt with it in the church and in the community. I was in a meeting last night with Georgia State Representative Alisha Morgan. I ran for that position twice, but Alisha got it. It doesn't matter to me. I care less who got it because during the time we were paving the way, we had to do what we had to do to get that way paved. It was juggling it; that's how you did it. When we went before the Chamber of Commerce, I never spoke. Earl was the mouthpiece—Earl Shinhoster. You set it up. Oscar Freeman and Dover Ferrell were the mouthpiece. I was fine with that as long as they gave us what we needed, and we got what we needed. When we did the grass roots, Bob Waymer was the mouthpiece, even down to signing the Fair Share agreement. I sat with Oscar Freeman and Dover Ferrell at Burger King, but I knew when I got ready to walk into Georgia State Bank I had to be quiet. I wrote everything down, what we wanted, what we did. The NAACP flew L.R. Byrd and Fred Rasheed into Georgia. It was all right with me to shut up and set it up from the back; women always have done that. We are awesome organizers.

That's what I love about the Cobb Republican Women's group. I see everything that I had to, how I had to take a back burner, how I had to do this. Pam Flournoy, I see her being a judge's wife. The Nancy Bodiford's, I see it, I know what they're doing. I've

always had to do it. The women make those men. You make them or break them and so that's what we had to do. When we wrote the Fair Share Agreement you very rarely will see me sitting on a picture somewhere; I'm normally taking the picture. To keep the history and to keep it documented and going because you saw Mickey Westmoreland, Oscar Freeman, Dover Ferrell, you saw, even down to Deane Bonner, myself, Mrs. Essie Densmore, you didn't hear from us. Mrs. Essie Densmore, I got a paper right here; she was the first woman that literally brought the NAACP in Marietta. Here it says, "For thirty years she had been in the NAACP." On here it has 1980, NAACP Founder; it's got Essie Mae Densmore. It has 1930. Apparently she died in 1980. If you go back thirty years that would have put her in 1950 with that Marietta branch of the NAACP. But Ms. Essie Mae Densmore was never a president. [She was secretary of the Marietta branch for many years going back at least to 1960]. Women just didn't step up to the plate, especially a black woman too. But I've learned that just as many white women didn't step up the plate either. So, you see, that's why you can't make it just be a one-way thing. The nine to five women, I mean, I worked with the Friends or the Quakers. I didn't even know what a Quaker was! They sent me to a place out at Little Five Points and fixed dinner for me at their house, and they began to teach me. It ain't always in a book. These were women that the husbands were right there, but the women knew how to do it. They sent me to Hogansville, Georgia, and I can remember my mother seeing me on TV and saying—my children were always with me—and my mother said, "Her husband's going to kill her." I was down there with the Klan on one side of the street and they were on the other side of the street with the anti-Klan network. There was a man that was speaking. That's why they took me down there. He was a reformed Klansman. I have been some places.

ES: That brings me to the next to the last question. We were talking about the masses of people, and that seems to be a common theme both with your upbringing and with your public work. Do you feel that ethnic and sexual equality have anything in common, especially with what we've been talking about, and do you think there are any issues yet to be resolved?

MC: I don't understand your question.

ES: Okay, the feminist movement, human rights and civil rights, do you feel that they share a commonality in any way?

MC: I do. In civil rights we have always been the backbone. We've always been the back to push. We're never second; we're always first. The NAACP is always first. It's second to nobody and second to none, regardless to what level, national, regional. The SCLC was always our brother or sister, wherever you want to phrase it as. The other organizations, Nine to Five, flew Mary Cater, the NAACP woman, to Georgetown University, and I'm saying, "Are they crazy? What am I supposed to tell a university and all those educated folks?" I don't even know why my house was shot into, but they put me with Nine to Five working women. I don't recall seeing any black people in the Nine to Five. I know there had to be. Every woman that I worked with, even down to the Quaker, Elizabeth, they were white women, and many times I guess Catholic or Jewish or

Presbyterian; they were in those denominations. So that was kind of like a clash too with me being a Pentecostal. Where is she getting this from? But I don't want to climb a telephone post. I never thought I would be a crossing guard standing on the street corner, but I am, and I'm still feminine. I am a woman, I am lady, I am a lady, I am a mother, and I am a grandmom.

ES: No way!

MC: Yes! But those women with grace handle those meetings; they knew what to do. Ruby Hurley when she walked into the federal penitentiary, I walked like she did when I walked into Reidsville State Prison, which was the first prison in the state. You walked with dignity. You walked with respect. Civil rights and women's rights worked hand in hand. Monica couldn't have been where she was. Joselyn Dorsey couldn't have been where she was. Cynthia Tucker couldn't have been where she was. Zinona Clayton definitely will tell she wouldn't have been where she was. That's why she wrote me. That's the only black woman that I had that wrote me personally. The Nine to Five women I had become a branch manager or head lead at a bank. I have a friend that's a psychologist, Daria Wilson; she's a publisher too up in Marietta. Kathy, Dr. Scott's wife, they drove me places, Cassville, to try to teach me. Mary Anderson, a retired school principal, Barbara Hollis; all of them were white women. "It's okay Mary to come out of that bag." But I didn't come out of the bag doing anything and everything. I came out doing progressive things, but these were women that did this, that said, "It's okay to do that." Judge Grubbs, it's okay to be right here; it doesn't make me a sinner to get into those areas and to reach out. I was doing the work. I was just hiding behind a man doing the work because that was the mentality of how we were taught to do it. The man has to do the work. When the women in the NAACP came forth, win. My husband at the time drove me to Kansas City. Even he was brought to that point of it's okay for her to be here. I had a pastor to tell me if I could tear you down I can break your family down. You're the one with the strong mentality. You're the one that we can't tear down to being just a humble little housewife. And we're best of friends now because number one, I didn't understand what he was trying to tell me, and he needed to tear down on me. My mother was a powerhouse.

My mother is my mentor. She was a powerhouse. She had to balance the same thing I had to balance. She had to balance my father, the home, fourteen children, but she was an outgoing woman around the nation. But she held her position as the national president of the Mother's Board. I never wanted to climb. I like for a man to open the door for me. I like my dresses; I pride myself in my dresses. I never wore pants until I became a crossing guard. I turned down jobs because I refused to wear the pants. That's the way we were brought up in the church. You didn't do certain things; you didn't dress like a man; you didn't do this; you didn't do that; so a lot of things have been torn down in our minds to let us know that some things may be a wait but it ain't all seeing. Nine to Five working women, I mean, I've had folks to pay to have me flown here and there, and I couldn't understand why are they doing this? But I needed to be educated. But a street education and that's what they did. The Quakers, when we went to the march on Forsyth, twelve went the first time, 100,000 or 200,000 the second time. My fear was torn down.

Mr. Flanagan would not let me be a coward so I could call names. Jandell Johnson was an educator; her people were educated. Jandell would not let me—I've had some cussing outs; "You will not be a coward. You can do this." So it definitely works hand in hand. You need the males to push you up and to know that you know how to act, you've been taught how to act, it's okay. My sons to this day, I tell them, you push that woman up. Now my name is listed as Mary Ward Cater, not to keep my maiden name identity; it was just three or four Mary Caters and three or four Mary Wards; that's in internal revenue something. You can take on that man's last name, but you have an identity, and it's okay to work. I've got a strong background with organizers. My great-grandfather on both sides, educators, my great-grandfathers on both sides, my mother, although my dad had a third grade education, because of the strong influence there he was able to push and even down to my father, my father, I worked with him for seventeen years. He peddled vegetables. My dad wouldn't let me be a coward. It was okay for a woman to take her spot so definitely I believe that civil rights and women's rights and women taking their positions are so, yes, that's why I do the women's in history program.

ES: To sort of wrap it up, what developments would you like to see in the future in reference to equality in general? Are there any projects you would like to see advanced, and this is basically a wrapping up question so anything you feel we haven't addressed feel free to talk about. We've got some tape left. Enjoy yourself! I'm enjoying myself, I love talking to you, Miss Mary, it's great.

MC: I would like to see women pastors on a lot of church records, not just getting the position and you go somewhere else to get your pastoral and you're listed as a missionary or a female's position because women are doing great things. That's in the religious sector. I think that women are moving into their positions. I was at the Republican veteran's brunch on Saturday, and the general, Brigadier General Maria Britt, the first with as high a rank as she has in the National Guard, I think it was; we're getting there. It might just be one that's getting to that spot or two that's getting there, but we're getting there. Little by little we're getting in the different places. I think you can have the education and still not get there because it hasn't changed that it's a man's world. But we're moving ourselves to getting there to the different spots. I try to teach even down to my daughters-in-law, you don't have to sit on back rows. My sons tell me even now, "Mom, you can be this, you can be that." Because they're a more educated group now of young people that's pushing the women a little bit further and a little bit ahead. Older marriages and relationships because I'm still in the church and I still hear conversation and messages like that. I think that that insecurity comes through especially our black men. We have to know how to handle it to not make them feel inferior or that we're putting them down. Go back to where my home was shot into and how I can imagine how Allen felt because I felt it. I knew when it was happening through the media I had to even address it from time to time by saying it's not Mr. and Mrs. Mary and Allen Cater; it's Mr. and Mrs. Allen and Mary Cater. Sometime in the home life we had to address it because it came across insulting. So I guess that's really it that I can think of.

ES: Well, thank you so much for sitting down with me. This has been such a great experience and I've really enjoyed myself.

MC: You're so welcome. Something else you had asked me on the telephone, I work with the Color on Public Safety where we do a prayer breakfast through them which is COPS that consists of bailiffs, 911, police officers, sheriffs and such as that, and even with them I received the president's award from them. That says a lot pushing women to the forefront, pushing them up. So it's a lot of things. Even with the NAACP, one year I got the community service award, and that was a lot of men behind saying we see that person doing their work, so in dealing with women and just relating back to women, when I ran for office it was awful. It was terrible. It was troublemaker, it was—now those were white men—it was like we've got to take it but your place ought to be at home. And that was in '86. I remember it was a lady, always I don't know why, always a white woman somewhere nearby; that lady from the justice department on elections, that woman was at different events where I was. She said, "I'm here to see how it is for you out here on this campaign trail." I remember the first time I saw here we were at Georgia State Bank. We had a watermelon spitting contest, and she came up to me and said, "I'm here to follow you to make sure that no harm comes. Is there any problem with the election? Are you being treated fairly?" Again, I still didn't know why she was with me as far as I didn't know the problems that were existing like that. Not only are you a black person, you're a woman too. She talked to me for a little while, and they gave me a telephone number that if anything happened all I needed to do. We could work the polls, we could sit at the desks and write off their names, check off who would come through. I did poll watching before, we could do that. But we couldn't run for office. That was a no-no. So it's just something to think back, this is why that was because see, liberation wasn't taught in our churches. So all of my training had to come from hard knocks, traveling the highways and byways and having different ones to come up to me and talk to me like the lady. I do not know her name. I just know she said that "I'm just here." And I always saw her near me whenever I went in to [different communities].

I had to go to Fair Oaks and speak; then they had a meet the candidates at Red Rock, Cheatham Hill, always was a woman that got me in a spot to speak. When I was on the campaign trail and the churches really liked that, even down to the civil rights was like that, there was nobody out there with me. Dover Ferrell, my first time running, helped me to get the money to run. My second time running Back to the Bible, Bishop Moss, they took up money to help me to pay my qualifying fees. Women were just not out there, not like that. So it's not just my church; it was that's the mentality that was thought of. I can remember being out there, and I just felt alone, I'm doing civil rights, and not a soul was traveling the roads with me when I would get into those places. I remember at Fair Oaks, Joe Mack Wilson got up and he said—now Joe Mack Wilson was the person I was running against—and Joe Mack Wilson got up, and I'm in the room with a lot of racist white people, and he said, "Hush up and let her say something. She has a right to talk." You could hear a pin drop. And I spoke. When I went to Red Rock, the same thing happened. Okay, another person had to say, and I feel that there were strong men saying, "Shut up and let this person talk." They were dealing with, I was a woman, one, and then black, two. On the campaign trail, when I ran in '86, never were any black folks out there. You see now when you organize a campaign, you've got committees. You've got 100 folks sitting in the audience to help you with it. That was not the case

when I first ran. When I first ran it was me, myself and I out there, yet behind the scene I knew that folks were there, but I needed them on the campaign trail too, and so I had to get guts. I had to not be scared. I had to, and I'm telling you, Roy Barnes, Steve Thompson, Melodie Clayton, I ran with her, Judge Melodie Clayton, Judge Nancy Campbell, Judge Irma Glover, all of us was on the same tickets running. Even when I ran against a Republican, Lori Davis and Herman Clark, they were always, "Let her have her voice to speak." They were the ones I was running against. It was that we have a right out there, so we tore down a lot and it was a lot of racism.

In that sense it was a lot of feminism, if that's the term for it; in that sense, it was even down to a white woman running, compared to a black woman running, the mentality was so different. It was just so different. It was like, she has a right. So that's the way it was. The justice department, J.C. Reynolds office, the NAACP men, Earl Shinhoster, Mr. Brown from down in Camilla, Georgia, it was the state president, they were on top of it if something happened with me. The night that my home was shot into, now you say, how can you get a telegram coming out of—Earl was in Jackson, Mississippi, I got a telegram that night coming out of Jackson, Mississippi that was to be delivered to my house, got a telegram from Mr. Reynolds up at the justice department. Earl sent him one and he had to send it to me that we are aware of it. But I attribute all that to Monica Kaufman. I think people were in place to help keep us protected. When I was on the field there was much protection. In the Book of Titus, it says we were sometimes ignorant; ignorant isn't a bad word, when you're unlearned in that area. I was sheltered in my area. I was with my dad, I was with my mom and I've already told you black and white wasn't an issue with us because we didn't know what neither color was no way. We just didn't focus on stuff like that. I love Louis Graham. He described me perfectly. I love Evelyn Newman; she worked for Mr. Carl Ware of the *Atlanta Voice* and would let us come in there and write a lot of our newspapers because he owned the *Atlanta Voice* newspaper and was a professor at Morehouse. I always had a background of somebody backing me. So they said, she don't have no knowledge of racism. She doesn't know—" Louis said, "She doesn't know she's sitting right in the middle of the Klan, and they could kill her, and she's just going anywhere!" I got insulted that Louis said that, he was the Chief of Police of Fulton County, but then as I matured. I understood what he was saying, he was right.

ES: He was concerned for you because you didn't know where you were going.

MC: He said, "Mary, they will kill you. Darrell Adams was the GBI agent. Every Klan event I was at, Darrell was right there. When we were in East Point, he said, "Mary, you get behind that fence right there. They will kill you. You are a church woman, and I know you don't know, but they will fight you, Mary. They'll fight us." When I was in Forsyth I got a video, and I'm going to let Tom use that video. I'm going to give that to you. I was in the middle of the Klan. I was filming, and Gary Washington was with the anti-Klan network. Now Gary was my friend, but Gary was ready to do whatever needed to be done if somebody got hurt. All I had was a camera and videoing, and Darrell was there again. He said, "Mary, they will fight you. They will hit you. You think a prayer is going to get it through with this. No, you're on the street right now. It ain't going to

be that way.” So they were correct with a lot of different things. When I came out of North Carolina and Evelyn was in the car, a guy was in the back. I can’t remember his name; a white guy was on the back. I was so mad at that policeman for pulling me over. He was so correct and so right. I was speeding, but we were coming from an anti-Klan network affair where we were always on the other side. Again, Darrell Adams was there. The GBI was there to teach me a lot of different things. “Mary, it’s real. The Klan is real.”

We had to deal with a lot of situations in Cobb County, situations that happened at McEachern, situations that happened. I would have them calling me over the telephone talking about cats. The night my house got shot into, I was talking to Dover Farrell. I was sitting on the bed. My telephone went out, and I’m saying, “Dover, can you hear me? Allen said the house has just been shot into. Dover . . .” We were talking business because we were getting ready to do that Fair Share. I’m saying, “Can you hear me?” He could not hear me. A person came over the line, talking about cats and talking about, “Did somebody get killed?” Or whatever they were saying, they were saying everything over the telephone. Then Dover faded back in on my telephone. I remember it very well. I know different little bitty things that happened that night. It is hard for me to believe that the Klan shot into my house. The Klan didn’t have the power over my telephone, but then I don’t know that because they were powerful. That’s just the way it was. The next day after my house got shot into, I remember a sheriff coming up to me. I was really fearful to work for the sheriff’s department. I’ve got a book that Evelyn wrote, and she worded it the way an anti-Klan employee would word it. I may word it differently now. I’m going to find the copy of that book. But this sheriff told me, there was a girl that had been missing, a white girl, they were looking for at Akers Mill. I think that they did find her in the trunk of a car. I was a head teller. My house had just been shot into, and he posted her picture in front of my window and said that, “We don’t care about your house being shot into. Tell those black folks go out there and find that girl.” I just thought that was terrible; I did. So it’s good to be educated and to know that everybody doesn’t have that same mentality. We get, if one policeman said it to you, all of them are the same way. That ain’t the truth. If one white person talks to you bad, that doesn’t mean that all of them are the same way.

END OF TAPE

## INDEX

- Adams, Darrell, 30-31  
Aaron's Tabernacle, 16  
Amalgamated Transit Union, 11, 13  
Anderson, Mary, 27  
Anti-Klan Network, 8, 9, 13  
Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 23  
Austell Colored School (see Washington Street Elementary)
- Barnes, Roy, 7, 25, 30  
Beavers, Bernice, 9  
Bodiford, James, Judge, 24  
Bodiford, Nancy, 25  
Bogazans, 17  
Bond, Julian, 11  
Bonner, Deane, 26  
Britt, Maria, 28  
Brown, Lucius, 5, 6, 30  
Burasky, Marsha, 11, 22, 23  
Byrd, L.R., 12, 14, 25
- Cater, Allen, Jr., 13, 22  
Cater, Allen Wylie, Sr., 1, 28, 31  
Cater, Mary Ward  
    Background and education, 1, 16  
    Family's land inheritance, 1, 2  
    Grandfather of (William J. Scott), 1, 3, 6  
    Father of, 1-2  
    Mother of, 1-2, 11  
    On the size of her family, 2  
    On the lack of schools for African Americans in Cobb County, 3  
    On segregation in Mableton, 3  
    On not being taught about race as a child, 4, 6  
    On not knowing white children as a youth, 4  
    On coming of age during the Civil Rights era, 7  
    Integrating Lindley Middle School, 7-8, 9-10  
    On the Klu Klux Klan in Powder Springs, Georgia, 7, 22  
    As a member of the NAACP, 8, 11, 12, 13  
    Being described as colorblind, 9, 15  
    Being abducted, 10  
    On the civil rights work of her mother, 11  
    On securing a home mortgage, 11-13  
    Discussing the shooting at her home, 13-15, 22  
    Confronting a well-know white supremacist, 14-15

On her first experience with racism, 15  
 On segregation in Cobb County, 16  
 On desegregation in Scott's Crossing, 16  
 On civil rights, 17-20, 25-27, 29  
 On Black and White relationships, 17  
 On women's rights, 19-20, 23-24, 26-27, 30  
 On running for office, 24  
 On education programs in prison, 24-25  
 On her mother's influence, 27  
 On women in clergy positions, 28  
 Color on Public Safety, 29  
 View on Ku Klux Klan (in general), 30-31  
 Cater, Nathaniel, 10  
 Cater, Xenophon, 13  
 Carter, Julian (Pastor), 7  
 Christian, Bonney, 14  
 Clark, Herman, 30  
 Clayton, Zinona, 23, 27  
 Clayton, Melodie H., Judge, 30  
 Campell, Nancy, Judge, 30  
 Cole, Sollie C., 14  
 Cobb Republican Women's Group, 25  
 Community Reinvestment Act, 12  
  
 Dade County (Florida), 21  
 Davis, Lori, 30  
 Densmore, Essie, 26  
 Dillard, Gwendolyn, 3  
 Dodd, Jerry, 21  
 Dorsey, Joselyn, 23, 27  
 Duke, David, 14  
  
 Eppinger, Mack, 14  
 Ervin, Sandra, 9  
  
 Fair Oaks, 29  
 Fair Share Agreement, 12-13, 26, 31  
 Farrakhan, Louis, 22  
 Felker, George William, 2, 6, 8, 16  
 Ferrell, Dover, 13, 15, 18, 20-21, 28  
 Flournoy, Pam, 25  
 Fields, Ed, 14-15  
 Flanagan, Robert, 11  
 Frederick Douglass High School, 1, 9-10  
 Freeman, Oscar, 14, 25-26  
 Freeman, Willie, 7

Ganns, 17  
Georgia Poverty Rights Organization, 25  
Georgia Council on Human Relations, 25  
Georgia State Bank, 11-12, 21, 25, 29  
Gibson, Mr., 22  
Glover, Irma, Judge, 30  
Graham, Louis (Chief), 9, 14, 30  
Green Grove Elementary School, 16  
Grubbs, Adele, Judge, 27

Hardin, Roy, Sr., Pastor, 24  
Harmony-Leland Elementary School, 9  
Hollis, Barbara, 27  
Hooks, Benjamin, Dr., 12, 21  
Hurley, Ruby, 18, 24, 27

Johnson, Jandell, 11, 18, 28  
Jones, Sheila, 4

Kaufman, Monica, 23, 27, 30  
Kennedy, John F., 6, 7, 18  
King, Martin Luther, 6, 8, 18  
Kimble, J.C., 6

Lindley Middle School, 7-8, 9-10  
Lockheed Corporation (Lockheed Martin), 18  
Love, Albert, 11, 13  
Little Bethel Church (School), 16

Mableton, Georgia, 3, 8, 16, 21  
Mable House (Mableton), 17  
Maddox, Lester, 7  
McEachern High School, 31  
Metro Fair Housing, 11  
Morehouse College, 30  
Morgan, Alisha, 25  
Moss, Bishop., 29  
Murray, Merlene, 18

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 8, 11, 12, 13, 18-22,  
24-27, 29-30  
Newman, Evelyn, 9, 14, 22, 30  
Nine to Five (Organization), 26-27  
Norrell, Mr., 13-15

Operation Push, 13  
Orange, Rev., 22  
Osborne, Rev., 22

Pauley, Frances, 24-25  
Partain, Lee, 11-12  
Pebblebrook High School, 1, 9, 10  
Penn, William H., Sr., 21-22  
Porter, John, 9, 17

Rainbow Coalition, 8, 13  
Rasheed, Fred, 12, 25  
Red Rock (Cheatham Hill), 29  
Reidsville, Phillips State Prison, 24, 27  
Reynolds, J.C., 30  
Riverside Elementary School, 9  
Runner, Betsy, 5

Sanders, Phil, 21  
Scott's Crossing, Georgia, 1, 5, 16-17  
Scott, William J. (Reverend), 1, 3, 6, 17-18  
Scott, Kathy, 27  
Scott, Thomas, 27  
Sears, Leah Ward (Justice), 2  
Shinholster, Earl, 11, 20-21, 25, 30  
Springfield Missionary Baptist Church, 16  
Stoner, J.B., 7, 14  
Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), 8, 11, 13, 26

Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, 24  
Taylor, Ruby, 24  
Thompson, Robert, Jr., 11  
Thompson, Sally, 11  
Thomson, Steve, 25, 30  
Till, Emmett, 24  
Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ, 20-21  
Tucker, Joe, 22  
Tucker, Cynthia, 23, 27

United Methodist Church, 22

Ward, Haskell, 2  
Ward, Susanne, 6, 9  
Ward, Virginia, 6, 8-10  
Ware, Carl (Atlanta Voice), 30  
Washington Street Elementary School, 1, 4, 5-6, 7

Washington, Gary, 30  
Waymer, Bob, 21, 25  
Westmoreland, Mickey, 11, 26  
Whittier Cotton Mill, 1, 11, 18  
William J. Scott Elementary School, 3, 16-17  
Williams, Wayne, 10  
Wilson, Daria, 27  
Wilson, Joe Mack, 29  
Wyatt, Merdice, 18

Zion Baptist Church, 24

This item is part of the following collection:  
Thomas Allan Scott, 1943-  
Kennesaw State University oral history project, 1978-  
KSU/45/05/001

The collection is held by:  
Kennesaw State University  
Archives, Rare Books & Records Management  
1000 Chastain Rd  
Sturgis Library Rooms 215-226  
Kennesaw, Georgia 30144  
(770) 423-6289  
archives@kennesaw.edu

To request permission to publish, reproduce, publicly display, broadcast, or distribute this material in any format, you must contact the Archives, Rare Books and Records Management.